



One Standard of Justice, Inc.

Testimony Supporting Raised House Bill 5389

AAC Collateral Consequences of a Criminal Record

One Standard of Justice, Inc. (OSJ) is a volunteer-based civil rights organization committed to ensuring that persons accused or convicted of sex offenses in Connecticut are treated constitutionally and fairly by the state before, during, and after their sentences through the use of evidence-based policies.

To the co-chairs Senator Kushner, Representative Porter and the esteemed members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, thank you for the opportunity to express support for RHB5389.

Good morning,

My name is Cindy Prizio here to present testimony on behalf of One Standard of Justice.

To start, I'd like to borrow a word used in the Hartford Chief Public Defender's testimony: bold. And then add beautiful and necessary! I'd like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Chairs for their support and willingness to take a deep dive in order to understand the problems faced by people with criminal convictions and their families in part through the work of the Council on Collateral Consequences of a Criminal Record.

OSJ enthusiastically supports RHB 5389.

96% of people who are incarcerated will return to our communities. In order to create and sustain safer communities, initiatives that are both rational and compassionate must be implemented. Many of these people want nothing more than to lead law abiding lives. In addition to the stigma of a “convicted criminal” many are limited by their lack of education, job experience, skills and pro-social support. ALL PEOPLE have in common the same basic needs: food, water, safe and stable housing, stable employment, access to education and job training. All people should have the ability to have a family, provide for themselves and their children, rather than becoming dependent on the state or others.

This bill will help break the cycle of prison remands, empower the powerless, help all to achieve something closer to their potential, restore human dignity. All of which we know to be basic human rights, and for the good of the ENTIRE community and state.

I’d like to share two abridged “testimonies” from mothers I have known for several years now. This family attended the BPRC public hearing with me last week.

“My son has not been the same since his conviction over 25 years ago. He is angry, hurt and resentful because of this sense of unjust treatment. He is unable to find employment, housing, unable to support himself and forced into odd jobs with no benefits or retirement making him a monetary burden on the state and my family. My family has suffered because of the broken system. I worry constantly.”

This mom shares:

“It is a long story and the details not be written, however since his conviction he has no employment because he is a “felon”. I watch him go through life on a day to day basis and see the loss of hope in his eyes. I have often said to myself he’d be better off in prison, at least the isolation would make sense then. Why should he continue to live as this is no life-not really, no freedom from past mistakes so in a nutshell no job, no opportunity, housing discrimination. He is not on paper what he is in person. This is living the American nightmare!”.

I too am a mother. My family is severely impacted by the barriers of a criminal record; my son’s life is on hold. I echo what the other mothers have said. I don’t see my family going out on their own because rents are too high and employment is practically nonexistent. I see us living together for the foreseeable future. He and many other young people are putting off having children. He is resigned to his situation not changing: what is the purpose of a higher education? “I still won’t be able to get a good job?”

Our system is designed to break people rather than lift them up. Often community supervision contributes to the inability to successfully reintegrate. Sanctions and stipulations can be harsh eliminating housing, employment, education and social opportunities on people who are trying to survive after being released from prison.

In closing we support the extensive scope of this bill and urge the entire committee to vote "YES!" This is the work that will make our state a true leader of criminal justice reform. This is the work that exemplifies "with liberty and justice for all."